

ABSTRACT**Shopping Assistance Method and Service System**

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A shopping assistance service system (40) is provided to which enquirers (8A) can submit enquiries regarding the availability of item of interest from local traders (70). The enquiry message (150) includes a description (151) of the item of interest, this description being intended for human interpretation and taking the form of image and/or unstructured audio data. The service system (40) automatically determines a location associated with the enquiry, this being either the enquirer's current location or a location where the enquirer intends to shop. The service system (40) then selects from a database of traders (44), traders appropriate to the enquiry at least in terms of location and the type of the item of interest, and forwards the description of the item of interest to the selected traders (70A,B,D). Traders (70B,D) then respond either directly to the enquirer (8A) or via the service system (40).

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20 **(Fig. 6)**

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